

10 Tips For Effective Internet Research in Elementary **by Tracey Hoover – January 2009.**

1. Make sure you have INSTRUCTED your students on the web searching procedures and rules. This is your responsibility! It is the first line of defense for you and your students.
2. BE SURE they have, know, and use a strict procedure for dealing with any content they come across that they believe to be inappropriate. Ex. RED DOT/HAND UP.
3. NO "Free Time" Googling or WebSearching – If your students are just goofing around on the internet and not searching standards related material or assigned/ approved material, they and you are at risk.
4. SET SEARCH "LIMITS" . Ex. Students may only use website or images that appear on the FIRST PAGE of a search. Ex 2. Students may only use the top three websites that appear and whose descriptions looks relevant. Ex. 3 – Students use provided websites only. *Make the limitations fit your class and your students.
5. NO BROAD SEARCHES – Provide students with or help them choose a specific topic. Ex. You would not want students searching "Diseases" but you might allow a search for "Parkinson's Disease" or "Facts about Parkinson's Disease".
6. YOU GOOGLE FIRST – It is a good idea at the elementary level, especially in the lower grades to preview the searches. Know what sites and images appear on the first page when you enter a specific word or phrase. *Note these may change from hour to hour but you will have a better idea of the quality of information to which your students will be exposed.
7. PROVIDE SITES – When it is appropriate for your students, give them a hotlist or bookmarked set of sites to search. This ensures they are using only relevant and appropriate sites.
8. LIMIT THE NUMBER OF SITES – Do the math....When students Google, they may get millions of site hits. A MILLION is TOO MANY. As a matter of fact, at the elementary level, if your students have limited time at a computer, 5 may be too many! *Teachers often say that the reason they don't find appropriate websites for students in elementary school is that it takes TOO MUCH TIME to browse and find the sites that have the information they need their students to have. *If an experienced, educated, and focused adult thinks it takes too much time to do a random search...then it is unlikely your elementary students can do so in a 20 minute computer station rotation. Also, STUDENTS CAN EASILY SPEND ALL OF THEIR TIME LOOKING AND NONE OF IT FINDING!
9. GUIDE THEIR RESEARCH – Internet Research is primarily reading. Just as you give them Guided Reading questions, give them Guided Research questions. They should start with very specific information. Ex. How high is Mt. Everest? Then, you can progress to the higher level questions. Ex. Give two facts and two opinions about Mt. Everest. Ex 2. Predict what will happen to Mt. Everest as more and more people climb to the summit.
10. DO NOT ASSUME! – Be careful not to make incorrect assumptions about your students and their internet comfort level.
 - a. **Reading level** - Recognize that many of the sites they find will be college level or above reading levels. *They may not be able to read or comprehend the information provided on each site. Ex. The many sites found when looking up Parkinson's Disease are medical sites!
 - b. **Validity** – Recognize that students cannot automatically discern which sites are appropriate and valid. At the upper grades, you should teach this! Ex. If you look up sites on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. many sites are sponsored by the US Government, historical societies, his family, and the KKK.

- c. **Usefulness** – Not all sites will actually have the information students need to answer questions or make inferences. This is where previewing really helps.
- d. **Spelling** – Realize that if students misspell a search term...they may find entirely different information than what they expected.
- e. **Skimming** – When students research through massive amounts of information, they must skim! This is a skill that must be taught. Do not assume they do it. If they read every line word for word, it will take them a GREAT DEAL of time to do research.
- f. **Printing** – realize that even at the lowest grades in elementary school, we must teach students that printing what they find on a topic straight from the internet is not usually acceptable. Exceptions might be maps, recipes, images, plans...etc.
- g. **Citing** – By the upper elementary grades, students should be taught to cite images and sources of information.

I know this seems daunting! I am not trying to discourage you from allowing your students to research. I am trying to make sure that both your students and you are protected when students do quality research!

It should not take more than 3-5 minutes for a teacher to locate websites, write guiding questions, and determine expectations for a technology station that goes with classroom content.

*****As a matter of fact, creating classroom technology stations that go hand-in-hand with content being taught in content areas can be an enriching and easy way for students to improve achievement and gain mastery!!!**